

1350

*The Powerfull Influence of Examples upon
the Principles and Morals of Man-
kind consider'd*

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SERMON

Preach'd at

*The Churches of St. Peter's and St. John's
near Winchester. JANUARY the
28th; 1721, 2.*

Prov. 1. 10.

**My Son, if Sinners Entice thee
Consent thou not.**

By **THOMAS BRERETON L. B.**
Late Fellow of St. John's Coll.
Oxon. and now Minor Canon of
WINTON.

GOSPORT. Printed for the Author.



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To the Inhabitants

OF THE

Parishes of St. Peter's and St. John's near
Winchester.

Brethren !

WHen I consider the Pernicious Effects and Fatal Consequences of ill Examples, and the real Advantages and Improvements of good Conversation, what powerful Instruments they are of Virtue and Vice, and what an Universal Influence they have almost ever had upon the conduct of Humane Life ; I have a Sufficient motive to induce me to Publish this plain Discourse, which is intended only for your Use and Instruction. And I hope you will look upon it as the Admonition of a sincere Friend : For never was the caution more seasonable and necessary than at this Time, when it is very much Suspected that some of my Parishoners are seduced from the Communion of the Church of England, and have Embraced that of Rome. I do strictly search and Enquire after such Persons as labour under the Suspicion of being seducers or seduced, and though I perceive the Papists have used their Arts of Solliciting and Deluding the poorest part of my Parish, yet I don't find they have prov'd Effectual to convert them, by their Frequenting Our Establish'd Church. However, it must be my Principal business and study to confirm their Adherence to it, by confuting the Popish false Doctrines ; for it is certain when loose Principles are Instill'd into the minds of Men, their morals will soon be corrupted.

And this is the sole reason of my Dedicating to you this mean performance.

You cannot but observe the Restless Importunity of the Romish Priests to gain Proselytes to their Erroneous Opinions, and it is probable that they may happen to visit you if you have not already heard from them, for they have

THE DEDICATION.

very Plausible and Insinuating ways of Address suited to the Capacities of all sorts of Persons. And therefore that you may not be Surpris'd nor Prejudic'd by these cunning Seducers nor imposed upon by their Methods of deceit, I think it a Duty incumbent on Me especially Your Minister to advise you to beware of Those with whom you converse: Men are generally such as the company they keep. And if so, then it highly becomes you to take Particular care of choosing your Familiar Acquaintance, lest your Faith be Infected with Popish Errours, or your Practice and Manners be corrupted by any Evil Communication.

You are so happy as to live near a Learned and Judicious Clergy whose known Abilities to direct you might justly prevent my weak Endeavours, and whose candour I doubt not will Excuse my Presumption to pretend it. But the just concern I have for the Salvation of your Soul will not suffer me now to be silent.

For since I have been inform'd that the Papists attempt to Pervert my Hearers, and some of the Reverend Prebendaries Themselves have desired me to Examine Them, in regard to their Request as well as to the due Execution of my Office, I think my self obliged as a Good Shepherd not only to Feed my Flock but also to keep them from Wandring, and defend them from those that would lead them astray.

Now that I may be Instrumental to promote so Good a Work, and may by Gods Blessing assist you to hold fast the Profession of your Faith without Wavering; to this End I offer to your serious Consideration the following Sermon. And that what I have there and now said may make a lasting impression to Engage you to persevere in the Faith and Practice of the Christian Religion, in the Doctrine and Discipline of the Purest Church of England, and in the Virtues of an Exemplary Life and Conversation, is the fervent and constant Prayer of

Your Faithful Pastor

Thomas Brereton

P R O V. I X.

*My Son if Sinners Entice Thee
Consent Thou not.*

I suppose I need not spend much time in proving to you the necessity of this advice *Solomon* here gives his Son, scarce the most Obstinate and refractory but will allow the Counsellor is good not to consent to the Enticements of Wicked and Ungodly Men; the only difficulty will be to square our Lives according to this wholesome Rule, and Especially in such an Age as this, when it is not only fashionable but reputable to be paramount in the mysteries of iniquity, and to be drawn aside by almost every temptation that offers it self.

Every one will pretend he is not the First that did amiss, and in all probability shall not be the Last, he knows he has Precedents sufficient to countenance his greatest extravagancies, and Examples mighty enough under whose Wings his impiety may take shelter, he tells you his Sins are Sins of daily practice, and therefore extenuated at least, if not Excused: *He argues that if he does not conform himself to the course of the World, he shall be thought a Puritan, be the sport of all he converses with, Pointed at as he passes by, and made the Song of Drunkards.* And such reflections as these he foresees will make him restless and uneasy, and

and therefore truly for his part he is resolved to prevent the occasion of them; will not oppose what he finds so difficult for flesh and Blood to Struggle with, and especially since he knows it so infinitely more easy always to Steer his Vessel with the Stream, and to be sure of company enough to raise his Spirit, what ever Succeeding Miseries may possibly attend him. But alas! *What a strange and Dangerous Mistake is this?* Such weak Arguments as these will neither Lessen the shame nor the Guilt of the Sinner. Surely we should count it very Unreasonable for any Man to perswade us to be Sick with him, or because his Extravagancies have reduced him to scarce a *Morsel of Bread*, that therefore we should follow him in the same excess of Riot 'till we have Brought our selves under the same unhappy Circumstances.

In Temporal Concerns we are not thus soft and pliable, *and why then can we be so Foolishly Fond to part with all that may be truly called Good, and Hazard our Immortal Souls only to accompany those who propose to be as Eternally Miserable as the Torments of Hell can make them?* This would be indeed to Act much below the Character of Men, much more of *Christians*: and therefore if we do but consider our selves under either of these Denominations, we must think the Advice of the *Wise-Man* to be highly Reasonable *If Sinners entice Thee, consent thou not.*

From which words I shall in general
Consider these three Points.

I. I shall allow indeed that so Seemingly Charming are the Enticements of Sinners and so usually Prevalent the Arguments of Great & Numerous Examples that it is very difficult to converse with the World, and not to be Overpower'd and Seduced by them. But Then.

of St. Peter's and St. Iohn's near Winchester. 3

2. I shall show that the more Difficult to be resisted, and the more Dangerous the Temptations and Enticements are which we have to Struggle with, the greater care and caution we ought to apply, and the more strictly to Watch and be on our guard in order to avoid them. And That,

3. Because it is so very Unreasonable that we should be moved, or however overcome by Them.

1. I Say, I shall allow indeed *That so Seemingly Charming are the Enticements of Sinners, and so usually prevalent the Arguments of Great and Numerous Examples*, that it is very difficult to converse with the World and not to be overpowered and Seduced by them.

The power and force of Examples we all know to be very strong and prevailing, but that of Ill Precedents (We find by a more Frequent Experience) to be most of all Alluring and Perswasive: Many wholesome Admonitions and cogent Exhortations to good, prevail not so much over corrupt Nature, as few Examples and those Backt with less inducements doe to Evil. Precepts and Instructions we see have but a small influence to draw and invire Men to an *Holy Life*, whereas on the contrary to live loosely and Dissolutely a very few Perswasions will more then suffice. And if so, then how much harder will it be to resist, when the Dangerous Examples we have grow Popular, become more Numerous when they are given by men of Note, Interest and Authority in the World? Then Vice must needs get strength and dominion, the Temptation will then arrive at the full height, and may therefore gain a more easy conquest and ascendant over the Unruly Wills and Affections of men.

When thus there is a cursed Confederacy and
Combination

Combination of Sinners, when Wickedness joyns as it were Hand to Hand, and draws it self into Leagues, when the Road is Smooth and the Passage made Broad and plain by the Trappings and Footsteps of others, then are we in great danger of either being Hurried on in the Crowd, or else of being by degrees Inveigled to Venture our compliance with those whose Imitation we are perswaded most Men will allow to tend very much to our Honour and Advantage.

Indeed there is scarce any Wickedness acted in the World, but what is countenanc'd either by the Number or Greatness of Those who commit it. *And both these God knows are no ordinary Inducements.* These procure credit to Mens Sins, and they are now impious by Consent and Sympathy; they can produce Authorities for their Rebellion against their Maker, and can *Quote Others* to Justify their Disobedience.

Custom we all allow is a second Nature, and that almost is reputed Lawful which is commonly practis'd and what is practis'd by many we presume should not be censur'd: And as for the Greatness of Mens Persons and Offices, what a Commanding Force does that carry in it to draw Men to Sin? The higher a Man is in Place and Station, the more Powerful Influence is in his Example; and because *Great Persons* do too often abuse their Protection and immunity from Punishment, many are Degenerated and basely led away by Them.

AUGUSTUS fill'd the World with Scholars, **TIBERIUS** with Hypocrites, **CONSTANTINE** with Christians, and **JULIAN** with Apostates.

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If a Ruler hearken to Lies, says Solomon, his Servants
are Wicked. Prov. 29. 12. If Herod mock Christ,
his Soldiers will revile him too: If Peter dissemble the
rest of the Jews Tho' his Fellow-Apostle, Barnabas will
Prevail: And so if a Father or a Master of
a family be Irreligious, a Neglector of Gods Worship, a
Swearer, an Extortioner or the Like 'tis Easy to
imagine how those under his Roof and committed to
his care (his Children or his Servants) will stand
affected and behave themselves.

So powerful you see are ill Examples, and Especi-
ally when invested with Authority, and countenanc'd
with the awfull Sway of grandeur. And if so, then
sure very Justly and Deservedly are those Fool-hardy
People to be reproved, who rashly and Inconsiderate-
ly thrust themselves into all manner of Company-
and converse Licentiously with all they meet; say-
ing with a presumptuous conceit they are so well set-
tled and rooted in their Religion so firm and Zealous
to their Principles that it is impossible for them to be
shaken or perverted.

But who is that Vain Man that is pufft up with
his Wonderful self Dependance? He must appre-
hend himself to be wiser then Solomon, Stronger then
Samson, and better grounded then Barnabas; for 'tis
plain in Scripture, that these were every one of them
seduced by ill Examples. And we have great reason
to suspect that the Royal Prophet David receiv'd some
prejudice this way by what He complains of in the
120. Psalm. 4. v. *Wo is me that I am constrained to
dwell with Mejech, and to have my Habitation among the
Tents of Kacar.* So Likewise we read that the Prophet
Isaiab was corrupted by evil Communication when
he cryed out, *Wo is me for I am undone because I am
a Man of Unclean Lips, because I dwell in the midst
of a People of Unclean Lips.* Isa. 6. 5. Which more
then seems to intimate that bad Conversation had

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infected

infected him and that a Good Innocent Man will very probably endanger his Integrity by conversing with the Wicked.

He that lies in the Sun, must expect to be scorched, and it was an *Heathens* Observation, *He that Associates himself with the Lame and Impotent will be apt to Learn to Limp.*

And it is just so as to the Course of Humane Life and Moral Conversations, Immorality of all kinds is productive of Immorality, and they whose society is chiefly with Common Swearers, Drunkards, Whoremongers, and Adulterers, will have too sure a tendency and inclination to all their respective Vices.

Sin is certainly infectious, and when it once gets head, and Men dare be openly prophane, it spreads like a contagious disease, and tho' for sometime we should keep our selves untainted yet by degrees we lose that aversion and abhorrence we had of it. When an habit of Sin has been long contracted the practice of it then will not seem so strange and Odious to us. The sense and apprehension of any Danger cannot but be much abated, when we see the greatest part of Mankind continually to out brave and daringly to defie it: And it is hard to retain a just and due Value for Goodness when it is defamed and contemned by those whose Wit and prudent choice in other affairs we think we have no cause to call in Question. So that it is our Duty to shun and avoid as much as is possible the conversation of Sinners, that we may not be drawn away by their ill precedency. And because we can't help being and conversing with them sometimes in the necessary concerns of this Life, we ought Humbly and Heartily to implore the Succours of *Gods Grace* that by the effectual power of it we may be preserved spotless and undefiled in the midst of a Stubborn and Perverse Generation. Which Leads me to the Second Head I proposed to consider, *viz.*

That

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That the more difficult the Duty is of resisting such ill Examples as are Great and Numerous the more dangerous and prevailing the Temptations and Enticements are we have to Struggle with, the greater care and caution a Christian ought to apply, and the more he ought to be on his guard in order to avoid them.

'Tis indeed a Notorious truth, that we are too soon overcome, but why we should be so is not to be Justified by reason or Scripture.

A vast swarm of bewitching allurements we are God knows Every Day nay almost every Hour and Minute Exposed to, and Flesh and Blood plead very hard for their admission; but where in the mean time lies our prudence and Judgment? We are told in Express terms that the End of these things is Death, and that this Death must be Eternal too; and is not the Melancholy prospect of this Enough to obriate all the seeming Satisfaction that we can vainly propose to our selves? *What tho' Broad is the way that leads to Destruction and many there be that go in thereat.* Yet will it be any Mitigation to our never ceasing pains to think that others feel them as well as our Selves? Can Companions in ever-burning Flames prevent the gnawing of the Worm that dies not or Extinguish the force of that Fire that is not to be Quenched?

I know nothing more Frequently, and more Earnestly Inculcated in Sacred Writ than that we should have no Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness, if it were for no greater reason than because they are unfruitful.

We are commanded also not to follow a Multitude to do Evil *by God himself.* Exo. 23. v. 2. Nor is this prohibition without very just reason; the greatest part of the World is usually the worst. *In the Old World before the Flood there were Multitudes of Wicked Men, but there was but one just Noab perfect in his generation. In Sodom there were many filthy Beasts to one*

Righteous Lot who was vexed with the Foul conversation of the Wicked. And for every single virtue we are very Sensible there are two palpable Extreame which we confess Vices, there is an Excess and a Defect: So that we may rationally conclude that the greater Number of Sinners however they may prevail yet they can be no safe Rule and Example to follow.

And here I shall undertake to answer now more fully and distinctly (*what before I did but just hint at*) those Frivolous arguments which Men offer, why they must comply with the Fashions and Customs of a Loose Age, and run with the Stream whithersoever it hurries them. And, I.

They pretend we are Sociable Creatures and were sent into the World on purpose to converse freely with each other, and therefore to be Singular would be to frustrate one of the main ends and designs of our Creation, and from hence they infer that 'tis therefore their Duty to avoid as much as is possible the odious Imputation of Singularity.

But I would fain know whether it be possible for us to be *Christians* without being Singular and reserved in many respects: 'Tis a shameful truth that the generality of Mankind have but little if any regard to the *Laws of God*, but if we think our selves as we ought Indispensably, obliged to the regular preformance of them, I cant apprehend how a multitude of Transgressors should warrant a Wilful Disobedience.

Indeed whatever Notion we may have of the Character of a *Christian*, if we would Distinguish ourselves to be the *True Disciples of Christ*, we must live up strictly to the rules of his Gospel, and answer it in a singular practice of Virtue and Holiness. Such an Exemplary Conversation will Undoubtedly redound most to our truest Credit and Interest, nay we may be assured our honour will be the greater by how much the fewer are of our side.

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'Tis true in trivial and indifferent matters to be singular is a fault scarce to be Justified, and which may deservedly expose us to the scorn and contempt of all men. But to be singular in any real Excellency is what the Best part of Mankind has ever been ambitious of, because it cannot but be highly commendable in the Eyes of all *Good Men*, and must be so more particularly approved of by the *All-Wise and Full God*: And however we may be disesteem'd by some profligate Libertines for living up to the precepts of our Holy Religion here, yet I Dare Engage all that fear and reverence God will not condemn us, and their Respect and Esteem is much preferable, and can abundantly Counterpoise all the censures and unjust slanders of the Wicked.

And why then should it prejudice Men against Religion because it is almost so universally slighted, what tho' the greatest part of the World are debauched, and contented to be miserable, yet I have my reason at command to govern my passions, and attend to the Wiser Dictates of my Conscience: There Extravagances can be no argument to draw me, their Infirmities and Miscarriages should make me the more cautious and circumspect to fortify myself against all their subtle methods of Temptation, and the sad prospect I have of their imminent Danger and Destruction should timely forewarn me to prevent my own.

But it is objected, 2. Unless we follow a Multitude, and *Do as most Great Men do*, we shall be censured as rude and unmannerly and betray a very rustick and clownish Education; and not (*what all Men covet*) observe the Mode and Fashion of the Age, and Country we live in. And indeed the more the shame? 'Tis a scandal and reproach to any Nation professing Christianity that any Custom should prevail beyond that of serving and obeying the most sacred *Author*

of the Christian Faith and Institution. But suppose we should to the utmost of our power Correct and suppress, and very Zealously oppose the fashion of vice, if we should deny ourselves this mark of a Gentleman, to be as Vicious and Extravagant as Opportunities serve us? where would be our Loss? what damage could we sustain? *All Good People would be sure to hold by us and be proud of trading and conversing with us upon this account:* Such a Man, say they, has a fear of God, and maintains a Conscience pure and Unspotted in all his dealings; nay even false and dishonest Traders will commerce with us for these very reasons, and however they are in their own practices, yet they Love and desire to Traffick with those of a different Stamp and Character.

Every Man abhors false Weights and false Measures in Others, however he may Act and Deal himself: But to be just and punctual (*if the common practice of the World be contrary*) is accounted a very Commendable Virtue in whomesoever it is found.

Those Men above others should renounce all pretensions to a Good Name, and Especially among Serious and Devout Christians who despise Religion and Its chiefest Virtues as Qualities beneath them; and yet These are the Principal and only men, who apprehend their own Reputation to be Great in the world, who look upon Themselves as the most Eminent Persons of Quality and Honour, who both talk and Act Licentiously without any fear of God or sense of their Duties; who are Atheistical and Profane in their Tongues and Practices, and whose whole Life and Conversation consists in Lewdness and Debauchery: And as to those Distinguishing Graces of Christianity, Humility, Meekness and Patience in enduring affronts and injuries, they call them a mere jest, the sole product of a mean Spirit which 'tis impossible that Men of their high Birth and Education should

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ever submit to. But be it so, Only let them withal Consider. that not many mighty, not many Noble are called, but the base Things of the World and things which are not has GOD chosen to bring to nought Things which are. 1. Cor. 1. 26. 28.

And what will all this Vulgar Honour signify when Almighty God most certainly does and will always Despise it?

But really the Lewd and Profligate Livers, (be their Number, their Birth and their Quality never so great) are not Honour'd and Respected among Men of the meanest Extraction; for whilst they continue in a vile Slavery to their Lusts and Passions they are not only in reality miserable, but (what ever fond conceits they may Entertain of themselves) they are in the Eyes of others most Odious and Contemptable. It is true the greatest part of Men (and it is pity that so many who profess Christianity should remain so Carnally minded) doe look upon the Man who will not Revenge an Affront to be Faint-Hearted and Cowardly, and wholly undeserving the Character of a Gentleman, whilst the Revengeful and desperate Duellist is the more Honourable and Heroick in the Eye of the World. Yet those who are sincerely wise and Religious have other thoughts of such a one, and count him the only Person of true courage and a Noble Soul who can despise the vain Opinions of the Croud in the Pursuit of Real Virtue.

And above all, the Meek and Forgiving Christian has this peculiar Honour and Happiness that he has an Easy access to the Throne of Grace, can come into God's presence with a Joyful Assurance; whilst the Gallant Hero (though the greatest on Earth for Quality and Fortune) dares not Approach him without fear and Trembling

And yet if vain Men will give the Honour to those

those who are most hateful in the Sight of God (it is very unfit and unbecoming those who call themselves Christians to do so) how-ever let the humble and Meek content himself, that here on Earth he has the Approbation and esteem of all just and Good Men, and shall receive in Heaven from the Un-erring Judgment of God a Testimony before the whole Chöre of Saints and Angels to his Eternal Comfort, a Testimony I say of the Divine Favour which will Exalt him above the Highest of Men, who consider their own Quality more than Gods Glory, and prefer an Empty Notion of honour before the Real and Substantial Grace of his Holy Spirit

God will not blame but Highly commend the good Man for his constant and however Unfashionable Adherence to his Duty.

He may Confidently Expect to be rewarded for his Improving those Talents which were bestowed upon him by his *Great Lord and Master* with this Gracious Applause. *Well done thou Good and Faithful Servant, Enter Thou into the Joy of thy Lord.* But, 3

There is another Considerable Objection remains to be answer'd. It is still pretended Notwithstanding all that has been said upon this Subject, that unless we follow Great and Numerous Examples, we shall be Every where liable to scorn and Derision and to the Scoffs and Reproaches of all we meet with. And what signifies all this Drollery, Slander and Detraction? It is no worse Usage than almost all the Saints and Servants of God have been Entertain'd with before us. *Was not Holy Job made a By-Word of the People?* Job. 17. v: 6. *Was not the Inspired Psalmist David became a Proverb?* Psa. 69. 12. *Were not St. Peter and his Fellow Apostles said to be full of New Wine when they were Preaching the Wonderful Works of God in all Languages?* Acts 2. 13. *And was not St. Paul that Chosen Vessel of God called a Babler, when He was able to with-*
stand

stand the Encounter of the subtle Epicureans and Stoicks?
Acts. 17. 15.

But what need I insist on these Proofs? When the very Captain of our Salvation *Christ Jesus* was used no better, Laught to scorn by the *Jews* in the High-Priests Palace, by the Soldiers in the *Prætorium* or Common-Hall, reviled by all that passed by, when he Hung on the Cross, Nay, and even by one of the Malefactors who were Crucified with him? And who are we then that we should rather Choose to be seduced by the Enticements of Sinners than hazard a little reproach for the sake of *Christ*? But consider, I beseech you how base and mean a thing it is for a Christian to depend upon vulgar Breath and Fame, or to place his Happiness in Popular Applause? Which is as uncertain as the Wind, or as a Child's Love which is gain'd and lost in the same Minute?

Is it agreeable to the Character of a Christian whose End and Aim ought to be the Kingdom of Heaven to neglect his chiefest Good by a fond Conformity to a vain and Impertinent World? Shall we be so mean Spirited as to Account it worthy our Care to get the frothy Applause of the World, and the most debauch'd part of it too? Instead of being pleas'd with the Vogue and Suffrage of prophane and dissolute Libertines it would more highly become us to take shame to our Selves, and let them know that we are very much griev'd and concern'd at our having committed such folly and madness rather than affected with their base Acclamations.

Socrates was wont to suspect that to be bad which the Vulgar part most cry'd up, and *Pliny* in his School observ'd that he commonly came off with the most Plaudite's who shew'd the worst performances? Shall we then who are Admitted Scholars into *Christ's* School make these the despicable Applauses of a Flattering World the Rule and Standard of our Acti-

ons. Some Heathens indeed to record their Names in the Book of Fame have attempted very desperate and Extravagant Exploits: but then the Reason of that was, because they knew no other way to be Immortal than by perpetuating and Transmitting their Memories to Posterity.

But we Christians are taught better things, to Enrol and Eternize our Names in Gods Book of Life and our Persons too in his Glorious Kingdom: To the Inheritance of which we can never attain by hearkning to those Enticements which will certainly carry us to another place. but by Imitating the Actions of the Just, and conforming our Lives to the Example of the *Holy Jesus*, by treading in his Steps and so recommending our selves to his Favour by a constant practice of Piety and Virtue.

But let us Consider 2. The Event and usual End of those who scoff at Men for their strict Devotion and Zeal for Religion and for not complying with the sinful fashions of a loose Age. *He that sitteth in the Heaven's shall Laugh them to scorn. Yea, the Lord shall have them in Derision.* Psal. 2. 4. And though 'tis possible that these prophane Scoffers and bold Deriders may escape here, yet St. Peter assures us that they who think it strange that the Righteous run not with them into the same excess of Riot, and speak Evil of them, shall give Account to him who is ready to Judge the Quick and the Dead. 1. Pet. 4. v 4. Let us Consider 3.

That as Christians we are not of this World but Citizens of another City the Heavenly Jerusalem and if so, then what Sinners doe, can be no fit Patterns for Christians to copy after. Let proud *Jerusalem* paint her face, and put on such Colour and Complexion (*Non quem Deus fecit, sed quem Diabolus in fecit*, as a Learned Author Expresses it, that is, not of Gods making, but of the Devils dying.) Let her dis-

guise

guise herself like a prostituted harlot : yet what Example can this be for a chaste Woman to follow, whose apparel and conversation must be adorned with modesty meekness and humility ? Let *Nabal* and *Holmes* Swim in their Drunkenness, and wallow Day and Night in their Revels and Debaucheries ; Yet they are no Presidents for the Children of the Light who ought to be careful and reserved sober and vigilant, *because their Adversary the Devil as a roaring Lyon walketh about seeking whom he may devour.* 1. Pet. 5. 8.

From these and many more Instances of the like Nature recorded in Scripture we may be fully convinced of the Necessity we lye under to beware of too much delight in the humour of mocking and jesting *Expressly forbidden by the Apostle Eph 5. 4. as not convenient, because it spares nothing Sacred and serious when 'tis indulged.* Let us take care then not to keep an intimate correspondence with People that are addicted to that or any other sort of Extravagance : For 'tis a wicked Life that is the chief cause of mens Ignorance and Contempt of Religion, or at least leads them to Superstitious Errors and Corrupt Opinions, There is a secret Charm and Infection in bad Company, that may insensibly allure and draw a well-meaning Person to an imitation of their Practices.

And Oh ! that the Youth of this degenerate Age would be perswaded to set a Mark upon all Debauch'd Profligate Libertines, and shun their dangerous Conversation. I am sure it becomes all of a virtuous Education, and Ingenuous Temper to avoid giving them any Countenance and Encouragement by Familiarity of Acquaintance. If we direct our Conduct by this Rule of Caution, we may Escape the Epidemical Infection that rages and spreads from the pernicious influence of bad Conversation and Examples. But lastly let us Consider,

The woful Effects of Sin, and consequently the fatal End of all Sinners; *Which the Apostle tells us plainly is Damnation*: and how dreadful that is may in part be known by the Pangs and Agonies of a despairing mind. And if only the Thoughts of being Damn'd are so Exquisitely Tormenting to those who Labour in this World under the intolerable load of a Guilty Conscience, then how infinitely more Exquisite must the Damnation itself be? O! Let us seriously consider, would any Motive persuade us to be in the Case of a Man's dying under the Agonies of Despair; if it would not, then it is a most reasonable caution not to live as he has liv'd, lest we should dye as he Dyes.

If there were no God, no Heaven nor Hell, no Day of Judgment nor Damnation, then Conscience would be a Childish Terror; but since there is most assuredly a Future State of Rewards and Punishments, Everlasting Happiness or Misery, Peace, or Wrath to come, let us live in Gods Fear that we may dye in his Favour: And not be (as St. Paul Exhorts Rom. 12. 2.) conformed to this World but Transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God, and so be made Partakers of his Heavenly Kingdom. But I proceed to a closer prosecution of the point in Hand.

Suppose an Holy and Strict life should Expose us to the Scorn and Contempt of careless and incorrigible Sinners, yet what is it they scoff and despise us for? The worst they can say of us is that we are nice and reserved, and have not learnt to live without Care and Concern for our Present and Eternal Wellfare; that we try our Hearts and Examine our Consciences, weigh all our thoughts, Words, and Actions, use our Reason and Understanding, and Believe we were sent into the World for some higher Ends than

than to be always indulging and gratifying our Senses: that we are not indifferent as to Health and Sickness, Peace and Disquiet, Life and Death: That we think there is something besides what is before our Eyes to be more peculiarly regarded; and that is a due preparation and constant readiness for our change and departure.

That we are well assured though a Distant Prospect of Happiness is not apt so sensibly to affect us as a present Enjoyment; yet now is the proper and only Time to make Provision for Eternity into which we may shortly Launch, and God knows how soon: and such important Considerations as these of what will become of us after we are Dead; do frequently Exercise our thoughts.

This is what Licentious and unthinking Reprobates pretend to object against sober and Sincere Christians, and if that be all, they ought Earnestly to implore the Divine Assistance that they may hold fast their pious Resolution and continue under these just apprehensions of their future condition to their Lives End: they should fervently desire, rather than in the least hazard their integrity, that if it so pleases God, they may constantly live and dye under such Ignominy and Disgrace.

'Tis plain then that the Many and Powerful Enticements to Sin should be no Arguments to prevail with us, and can be no manner of Excuse for our Transgressions: wicked Men can only persuade and Entice, but they cannot Constrain us to sin.

God may suffer a Temptation to enter into our fancy which may very Probably paint there the most alluring Images that Vice can be represented in; but when these forcible Strokes are set in a clear Light, we must acknowledge it is still our own choice that makes us like what the Devil's Pencil has drawn there.

And

And therefore whoever sins upon an Enticement, sins not meerly because he was Enticed, but because he would sin.

Our inordinate Appetites and Affections are too violent for the weak restraints of Reason, and yet have not force enough to resist the powerful solicitations of sensible Objects.

No wonder then that the Devil whose subtle Insinuations had been able to beguile our First Parents in the State of Innocence, should now a Days draw us on to sin with greater facility, when our own Desires and Inclinations are become also our Tempters. When therefore we are drawn aside, we must not think to lay the Fault on the Seducers; for tho' it be their Crime and Guilt to Tempt, which truly we could not prevent, yet it is only our own fault to yield to their Temptation; and God will not Condemn us for being Tempted which we could not help but for consenting, which is our own free Act, and our own Sin also.

Whoever is drawn away and depraved by Lewd Companions to abuse his Body, and weaken his Constitution by Riot and Luxury, or to break the Laws of God and Man by Murder, Theft, or any other Capital Crimes; Though he has a great deal of reason to blame them, yet has he Infinitely more to abhor himself: he was under no force, but Sinneth freely, and upon very poor Motives doth destroy his own Soul. Especially since all Inducements to sin must be accounted weak when God has overbalanced them with the Hopes and Fears of everlasting Life and Death, and the promises and threatnings of future Rewards and Punishments.

But though it be no Excuse for Sinning to plead that we have been Enticed by Many and great Examples, yet it is seldom known that those who lye under these Temptations can get off securely with-
out

of St. Peters and St. John's near Winchester. 19

out contracting some guilt upon their Consciences by them; for since there is so close a connexion between the Enticements of Sinners and the Corruptions of humane Nature? it would be as Strange for a Man that has been hotly assaulted by them to have no Impression made upon him, as to carry fire in his Bosom and his Cloaths not be Burnt, yea almost as Miraculous as to walk in the Midst of a Fiery Furnace untouch'd by the Flames.

And therefore I must once more repeat my advice to secure us from the Danger of Enticements, let us Watch and Pray lest we enter into Temptation, and avoid as much as is possible the very first motion and Attempt of wicked Instruments to seduce us.

'Tis our Lords Command Express't in his own most Comprehensive Form of Prayer to beg of our Heavenly Father that we may not be led into Temptation: and hence it is that when God in Holy Scripture dissuades us from Sin, he extends the prohibition to all occasions of it; nay those things which in their own Natures consider'd may be lawfully and innocently done by us, yet because they may prove snares to us, we must as carefully refrain from, as we earnestly Endeavour to doe always what is Righteous in the Sight of God.

I shall Enforce the necessity of this Admonition in the words of St. Paul. 1. Thess. 5. 22. *Abstain from all Appearance of Evil.*

We have Treacherous and Deceitful Hearts within us that have often betray'd us into Unwarrantable Compliances.

Methinks then former Experience should make us all more wise and cautious, and never again trust them with opportunities for Wickedness, since they prove such dangerous Enemies as to Embrace the least Temptation to Vice and Immorality. For what Security have we that a corrupt heart will not prevaricate,

varicate, and Ensnare us to commit such abominable Sins as we can't possibly reflect upon without the utmost Horrour and Astonishment?

And now from what has been said, 'tis very Easy for a Christian to Determine what his Behaviour must be in this World, in order to gain Admission into a Better.

'Tis plain he must not do as the Generality of Mankind doe. *Noah* must not follow the Courses of the Old World; nor *Lot* be as Filthy as the *Sodomites*. *Job* must not observe the Fashions of the Land of *Uz*, nor *Joseph* Worship the Idols of *Egypt*. These are not Justifiable Conformities: But we must so live in this World as to have our Chief Conversation in Heaven; must so converse with the Better Part of the World, as to detest all the Impure Practices of the Wicked. And since Enticing Sinners would recommend their Vices to us by the Number and Greatness of Those that commit them, we who are Christians should Endeavour to weaken their Argument by Lessening the Number, Every Man one; and not only so, but by striving to draw them out of it into the Kingdom of God.

We see false Churches spare no pains but Compass Sea and Land to gain Profelytes to their Haeretical Errours; and we may observe *Abbeys* too as industrious to advance the Kingdom of Satan.

What infinite Reasons then and Obligations have we who are Members of the Purest and the Best-Reform'd Church, who have the Noblest Cause and Constitution in the whole World to Defend to be so much the more Diligent and Zealous to convert Others to the True Faith that the Kingdom of Satan and Antichrist may be pulled down, and *Christ's Kingdom Enlarg'd*?

And Oh! If so Many Bad Examples Even against Reason and Enterest do so far prevail with Men to their

of *St. Peter's and St. John's near Winchester*. 21
their Ruin ; what mighty power and influence would
Good Examples enforce with all the Arguments for,
and Advantages of Religion ?

What an Age of Virtue, Peace and Prosperity
should we Enjoy, if Men of Dignity and Renown, of
Parts and Learning, of Birth and Fortune would be
as Good as they are Great ? Men of Lower Rank
and Condition would be afraid to sin, if Men of High
Stations, Titles and Families would be Conspicuous
in Their Examples, and freely offer Themselves to
the World for Patterns of Holy Life and Conversation.

Thus they might Engage others to be good, and
soon retrieve the Honour of Our most Holy Religion ;
answer the intent of Good Laws, and bring Virtue
and Piety again into the greatest Credit and Venera-
tion.

Were such Men's Lives suitable to Their Profession,
Sinners would be soon put out of Countenance, and
be Asham'd to appear in the world, their party
would grow Inconsiderable and they would have but
little or no Power to draw Others over to Their
Side : For there is not a more winning and moving
Sight in the World than to see the Life of a Christian
led Exactly according to the precepts of his Religion.

And were there not in all Ages some such Persons
of Authority and Fame whose Zeal for Religion In-
spires Them with so much courage and resolution as
they are neither Afraid nor Ashamed of being Honest
and Innocent ; We should soon lose not only the
Power but even the Form of Godliness too.

And God knows how many make Shipwreck of their
Consciences only because they have not Spirit enough
to be out of the Mode and Fashion ; a Weak Argu-
ment indeed ! And I pray God that All who profess
the Name of Christ may depart from such Iniquity :
And that instead of our consenting to the Enticements
of Sinners, Sinners may consent to the Pious Exhorta-
tions

tions and Examples we give them, and be reclaimed by seeing our Immoveable Perseverance in the Duties we Owe to God, ourselves, and our Neighbours; remembring what is promised. Dan. 12. 3. *They that turn Many to Righteousness shall shine as the Stars for Ever and Ever.* And for a further Encouragement of such a Religious Course of Life St James assures us Chap. 5. v. 20. *He that Converteth the Sinner from the Error of his way shall save a Soul from Death, and hide a Multitude of Sins.*

I conclude all with that Excellent Collect of our Church appointed for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany.

O GOD, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our Nature we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all Temptations, through Jesus Christ Our Lord.



F I N I S.
